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SRI

SRINGERI JAGADGURU AND THE KARNATAKA SAMASTHANAM

BY

PROF. K. R. R. SASTRY, M.A.M.L.

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FOREWORD

I have read Mr. K.R.R. Shastry's booklet dealing with the Sringeri Mutt and Kings of the Karnatak. I found it most interesting and instructive. I hope a large circle of readers will benefit from reading it.

Jaya Chamaraja Wadiyar

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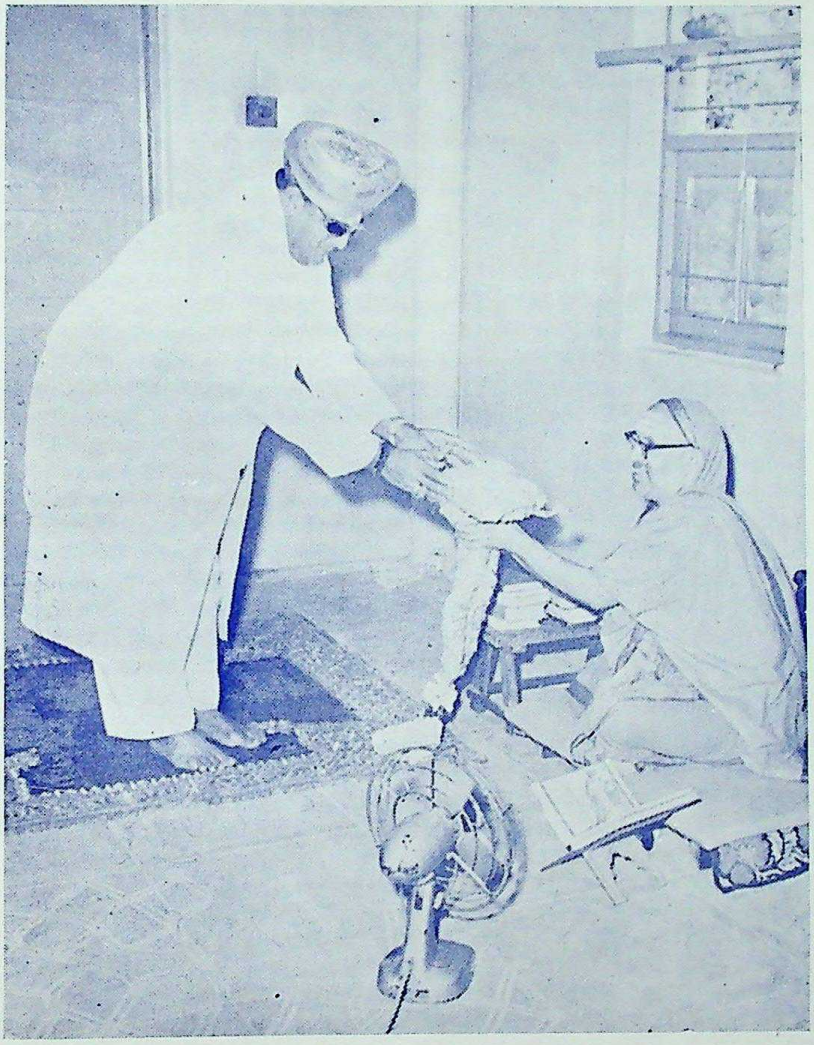

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SRI SANKARA'S LIFE

The institution of *'Raja-guru'* is as old as Ramayana if not older still. A just monarch aided and advised by a Spiritual Sage is the essence of *Raja Dharma.*

Such in brief has been the never-snapping link between the Sringeri *Jagadgurus* and the *Karnata Samrajya.*

Some old verses current in Kerala summarise the life history of Sri Adi Sankara.

"Sankaracharya, 'the Lord of Bliss', incarnated on earth to dispel the evils that had crept in the Eternal Religion of the Vedas. "Born in *Kali* 3889 (A.D. 788), he had learned the Vedas by the time he was eight years old; at the age of twelve he had mastered the *Sastras;* at sixteen he had completed his *Bhashyas* and at the age of thirty-two corresponding to *Kali* 3921 (A.D. 820) on the *Vaisakha Purnima* day, he entered the 'great cave' (meaning the "life Eternal)".

Born in Kalati (Kalady) in Kerala, Sri Sankara received *Sannyasa Diksha* from Sri Govinda Bhagavatpada on the banks of the Narmada, then went to Varanasi and Badri, composed his *Bhashyas, Prakaranas* and Stotras, toured the country from the Himalayas to Kanyakumari and cast off his mortal coil at Kedarnath.

Behind Sri Sankara's advent lay the memory of centuries of the great quest for the realisation of the one great cause behind the manifold phenomena of the universe. The spiritual light that the sages and seers of the race had shed as the result of the quest had, in course of time, lost its brilliance. Truth was obscured by false doctrines and impure rituals that man in his selfish craving for pleasure and with his imperfect logic had devised. The need of the hour was the descent on earth of the Jnana aspect of Brahman, and Sri Sankara incarnated not to root out any faith, but by the alchemy of his intellect, to purify and sublimate all beliefs. He has bridged the old and the new. Not a new religion, not any new creed did he preach, but clothed the age-long Vedic message in words of beauty and power so as to illumine men's minds for all times. His is a voice of certitude, of assertion, of conviction that liberation can be had "here and now".

Most significant perhaps among the immortal achievements of this, the greatest of synthesisers, was the establishment in the four corners of India of four *Pithas* or centres of learning and spirituality, each presided over by one of his four great disciples.

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Each one of these disciples stands at the head of a *sisyaparampara* (line of disciples) and in his person represents the Divinity of Sri Sankara and embodies the purpose of the Master's descent.

The earliest, by some accounts, of these four *pithas* is the one at Sringeri, the Dakshinamnaya Pitha, which holds sway over the south of the Peninsula, roughly from the Godavari to Kanyakumari. It has an uninterrupted history of achievements from the time it was founded to the present day.

Rightly does every part of India claim that Sri Sankara moulded the life of its people, and it is difficult to say which region was benefited most. His work of integration and uplift may appear different in the different regions, but the pattern is the same. This brief review pertains to the region that may be termed 'Karnataka', the homeland of the people who speak Kannada.

Gokarna is the starting point of Sri Sankara's triumphal tour in Karnataka. Passing through Kollur which enshrines Mukambika and the ancient city of Bali (Belgaum), he entered the region known in olden days as Marukere Vishaya studded with the hermitages of scholars and saints on the hill slopes and the banks of the Tunga and the Bhadra and their tributary streams. Here he espied the beauteous site where Rishyasringa, and before him, his father Vibhandaka, had their hermitages. Charmed by its beauty and the atmosphere of peace that enveloped it, he established here his *Asrama*, which soon he converted into a *Pitha*, with the temple of Sarada Devi, a replica of the Sarada Pitha in Kashmir. He named Sri Sureswaracharya, the first head of this *Pitha* which came to be described as the *Vyakhyana Pitha* or *Dharmapitha*. The rulers of the land soon realised the importance and greatness of this new seat of learning.

II

Sri Sankara's contemporaries on the Rashtrakuta throne were Govinda III and Amoghavarsha I also called Nripatunga. Though a patron of Jaina monks, Amoghavarsha fostered the Vedic religion also. In the time of his successor Krishna II who was the overlord of the Gangas, was built the temple of Sri Janardana in Sringeri; the pontiff at that time was Sri Jnanaghana Rashtrakuta. Govinda IV created several *agraharas* which were centres of learning; the college at Salotgi is said to have had 27 boarding houses for its scholars, in some of which Vedanta was taught. In the reign of the Eastern Chalukya King Raja Narendra, Pombulcha (Hombal) attained celebrity, and Vedanta was one of the subjects taught in the college there. Amidst the several Pasupata monasteries in Belgamue, the Mandalesvaras of Hoysala Narasimha I and Vishnuvardhana established Vedic colleges where Vedanta also was taught. Hoysala Ballala II took to the study of Advaita under Achalaprakara, a disciple of the Sringeri mutt. All these point to the influence of the Sringeri mutt. During these centuries the Acharyas of the Sringeri Mutt

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were mostly engaged in worship and imparting instruction, and did not solicit help from kings and were content when the rulers fostered learning and helped them to spread knowledge by founding schools in different centres.

III

The brothers Harihara Raya and Bukkaraya, who early in life, had been blessed by Sri Vidyasankara, came under the influence of Sri Vidyaranya and with the help and blessings of the sage, built the city of Vijayanagar and founded an Empire. Sri Vidyaranya himself celebrated the coronation of. Harihara. Thereafter the brothers marched from victory to victory till the Empire extended from sea to sea. The grateful Emperor rightly dedicated his imperial insignia to the Sage's holy feet and henceforth the Sringeri Acharyas came to be addressed as *Karnata Simhasanasthapanacharya'*.

The first land—grant in 1346 to Jagadguru Bharata Tirtha was that of Harihara, his brothers and relations. The second in 1356 was that of Bukka, which was soon followed by another. In 1380 Harihara II consolidated all the previous grants and added to them further grants in 1387 and in 1389-90 grants outside Sringeri included those by Bukka and Harihara II. These grants formed the nucleus of the Sringeri Samasthanam, and symbolised the great reverence and gratitude of the Emperors who further expressed their devotion in several of the invocatory verses in their grants. Thereupon the *Vyakhyana simhasana* in Sringeri assumed secular authority. Royal munificence made it possible for Sri Bharati Tirtha to raise the magnificent temple in Sringeri to the memory of his Guru, Sri Vidyatirtha and to found a great academy, perhaps unrivalled in those days, which counted among its members several scholars of eminence including Sayana the Vedic commentator and his brothers Madhava and Bhoganatha who enriched the Sanskrit language with classical treatises on all the branches of Vedic and secular learning.

The successors of Harihara II vied with one another in honouring the Sringeri Acharyas and getting spiritual initiation from them. Virupaksha honoured Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati I, Bukka II Sri Purushottama Bharati I and Devaraya and Mallikarjuna Sri Sankarananda Bharati. Mallikarjuna gave some more villages to the Mutt.

Sri Purushottama Bharati II was on the *Pitha* when Vijayanagar witnessed two revolutions in 1486 when Saluva Nayaka seized the throne and again in 1491 when Narasa Nayaka established the Tulu Dynasty. The Acharya sent his blessings to Krishnadeva Raya before the latter led a hazardous expedition against Virarudra Gajapati of Kalinga. The Emperor received the Acharya's representative with signal honours and made grants of villages. Needless to state the Emperor's arms won resounding victories in Kalinga and also against Bijapur, Ahmadnagar and Golkonda. There are records of grants during the reign of Sadasiva Raja and of Sriranga Raya I (of the Aravidu dynasty).

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IV

After the destruction of the imperial capital in 1565 and removal of the seat of Government to Penukonda, civil wars within and threats of invasion from without placed the land in a vortex of chaos and insecurity while the Nayaks of Tanjore and Madurai had thrown off the imperial yoke, those of Vellore and Keladi, and the Wadeyars of Mysore professed formal allegiance to the shadow empire. Sringeri Samasthanam came under the protection of the Keladi Nayaks, who though brought up in the Virasaiva faith, were devotees of the Sringeri Matt. The patronage of Venkatappa Nayak I to Sringeri and the liberal grants he made won for him the title of *Visuddhadvaita pratisthapana dhurandhara*. Virabhadra Nayak not only donated villages, but forbade the Tirthahalli swamis to display the insignias that were the exclusive privileges of Sringeri. He restored to Sringeri some villages which the branch mutt at Kudli attempted to secure. He declared that the Jagadguru of Sringeri had authority to enforce obedience from other mutts without having to appeal to the Nayak. The services of Sivappa Nayak to the mutt were as numerous as they were materially important. He restored to the mutt lands that had been usurped by others and particularly the villages that had gone into the possession of the Kudli mutt. He got the irrigation sources repaired, resurveyed the lands and effected a settlement. Bhadrappa Nayak II also restored to the mutt two villages. Somasekhara I, Rani Channamaji, Basavappa I, Somasekhra II and Rani Virammaji not only prevented usurpation of the mutt lands by unscrupulous people, but helped the mutt in the collection of revenues. They remitted several dues to the state from the mutt and invariably enforced the mutt's decisions in their enquiries relating to Achara. The reception that Sri Satchidananda Bharati II got during his tours only underlined the hold the Acharyas had over the loyalty and devotion of the chiefs of Karnata, including the Tulu country, who signalised the occasions with grants of land. In 1761 the Keladi Kingdom was liquidated, and the rising State of Mysore assumed the hegemony of South Karnata.

No greater testimony can be had of the spiritual influence of the Sringeri Acharyas than the advice that Rani Channamaji gave to her adopted son Basavappa. "Meditate upon the basic principles of *dharma* and realise the truth of Advaita, Honour those who are proficient in Vedic lore. Regard life as but a dream and reflect on the question 'who am I' ". These are some of her precepts

V

The kingdom of Mysore emerged as a distinct power under Raja Wadeyar, who captured the seat of the Viceroyalty of Srirangapatnam from Prince Tirumala, and got confirmed in the possession by Emperor Venkata II. He kept clear of the civil war among the feudatories of Vijayanagar, and consolidated his

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kingdom; communication with Sringeri being difficult, he requested Jagadguru Abhinava Narasimha Bharati I to appoint one of his disciples as Guru in a mutt in close proximity to his kingdom. The Jagadguru nominated a learned disciples of his, Sri Sankara Bharati, as Guru of a branch mutt at Sivaganga about 38 miles from Bangalore. This was the origin of the Sringeri Sivaganga Mutt. Maharaja Kanthirava Narasaraja Wadeyar presented to Sri Satchidananda Bharati I costly images of Gods and Goddesses carved in precious stones. Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadeyar II sent from Srirangapatnam elephants, costly silk and other valuable offerings to Sri Satchidananda Bharati II, whom he felicitously described as 'the ruler of the yoga empire seated on the jewelled throne of Sringapura'. The Acharya founded a mutt at Belur to which the Maharaja's officers made several offerings. The Maharaja invited the next *guru* Abhinava Satchidananda Bharati I to his capital in the sure belief that the Acharya's presence in his State would bring in the much needed rains for the country, and granted Belvadi and its hamlets all worth 1,200 pagodas. He also issued a *rahadari* directing his officers to afford proper escort and supply provisions to the Acharya during his pilgrimage to Ramesvaram. His government rendered all necessary help to the mutt in the collection of dues and contributions, in the maintenance of order in the villages and in the enforcements of the Jagadguru's decrees in questions of *achara vichara.* Lands granted to the mutt by private parties were ordered to be treated as *sarvamanyam.* It may be observed that the Maharaja's letters to the Jagadguru were adorned with gold illumination.

The period which saw Haidar Ali and Tippu on the throne of Srirangapatnam forms a sort of *interregnum.* The two Sultans evinced the greatest respect for the Sringeri Jagadguru. In one of his letters, Haider Ali wrote to Sri Abhinava Satchidananda Bharati I; "you are a great and holy personage. It is but meet that all should desire to pay respects to you." This was written when the Acharya was on his way to Poona at the invitation of Raghunatha Rao. Haider Ali also sent the Acharya an escort of one elephant, five horses, a *palanquin* and five camels together with presents of gold and silver garments, shawls and and 15,000 rupees for the expenses of his journey. He deputed his officers to Sringeri during the absence of the next Acharya Sri Narasimha Bharati II to see to the proper maintenance of the charities and the *samasthanam* lands. Later he issued *nirupas* to his officers directing them to render all the assistance that the mutt might require.

When Sringeri was pillaged by the Maratha soldiery in 1791, Tippu sent 400 *rahatis* for the consecration of the temple together with a *palanquin,* elephants and clothes. On several occasions he solicited the blessings of the *Acharyas.* He once said that he depended upon three sources of strength—God's grace, the Jagadguru's blessings and the strength of his arms. He once requested the Acharya to perform *Satachandi yagna* and acknowledged the

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miraculous effects of the *yagna*. He sent *rahadaris* with large amounts of money whenever the Acharya went on pilgrimages. It is very refreshing that Haider Ali and Tippu continued the policy of the Wadeyar House in honouring the Jagadgurus. Maharaja Chamaraja Wadeyar also sent elephants and several ornaments to the Jagadguru.

Purnaiya, who carried on the administration during the minority of *Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadeyar III* was not behind others in his services to the Sringeri Samasthanam. He enforced on his officers that the rights and privileges of the Sringeri Mutt should be respected, and, himself, meticulously enforced the authority of the Jagadguru over subordinate mutts. He saw to it that no other Guru exercised the privilege of being taken out in *addapallakki* which was the exclusive privilege of the Jagadgurus of Sringeri.

When Maharaja Krishnaraja assumed full ruling powers in 1811, he extended a respectful invitation to Jagadguru Satchidananda Bharati III to visit his capital, and offered as an act of homage, the village of Harakeri where the Acharya observed his *chaturmasya vows*. The relation that subsisted between this Ruler and Jagadguru Narasimha Bharati VIII is an inspiring saga. In 1828, the Jagadguru was in Mysore when fourteen villages and two hamlets were gifted to the mutt. The Maharaja confirmed the right of the mutt to own and cut sandal wood trees in the *sarvamanyam* lands, and ordered the amildars to exempt from tax all articles brought to the mutt and to enforce disciplinary actions taken by the mutt against wrong—doers. Palace servants also were brought under the jurisdiction of the mutt in the matter of *acharavichara*. He further confirmed the right of the mutt to the property of disciples who died without heirs, subject to a certain limit, and civil suits such as those relating to partitions of property among the disciples were referred to the mutt. He jealously upheld the primacy and prestige of the Sringeri peetha by forbidding swamis of the minor mutts to use unauthorised insignia. Other communications from the Maharaja refer to presents of costly jewels, silver and gold vessels to the temples in Sringeri and a car for the Sarada temple.

By an act of injustice perpetrated by Governor-General Bentinck, Mysore was placed in 1831 under the administration of British Commissioners. During this period of grief, the Maharaja turned to the Jagadguru for consolation and spiritual advice. He wrote several letters to the Acharya and kept him informed of the auspicious events in the palace. In 1854, the Acharya came to Mysore and gave spiritual initiation to the Maharaja, who, to mark the occasion, announced an annual grant of 12,000 rupees to the mutt. In 1861, the Maharaja went to Sringeri.

To the Maharaja goes the credit of influencing his court Pandit Lakshmi Narasimha Sastri to hand over his brother Sivasvami to the Acharya for nomination as successor to the *pitha*.

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In response to a pressing invitation from Maharaja Chamaraja Wadeyar, the next Jagadguru Sri Satchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharati went to Mysore in 1901 and held the *sadas of pandits* during the Ganapatipuja festival. The Maharaja himself attended the evening discourses on these days. The news of the demise of this Maharaja, which the Acharya learned when he was touring in the Ramanathapuram district distressed him so much that he considerably cut down the rest of the tour and hastened to Mysore to console the Maharani Regent and bless the two princes. He prayed to Sri Sarada Devi to bless them 'the two noble sons of Chamaraja' and the verses in which his prayer was couched was ordered to be sung daily in the Sarada temple.

The young Maharaja Krishnaraja Wadeyar IV with his brother and English tutor Fraser came to Sringeri in 1898 and got the Acharya's blessings before assuming the reins of administration. He repeated the visit in 1901. The munificence of the Maharaja and the efforts of his dewan V. P. Madhava Rao provided the mutt with an extensive plot in the heart of Bangalore which was named Sankarapuram, where the Acharya built a magnificient mutt building and consecrated a shrine to Sri Sankara in 1907. In 1910, the Maharaja visited Kalady to worship in the newly built shrines there and pay his respects to the Acharya. During his return journey the Acharya instituted a college of Higher Sanskrit studies—the Bharatiya Girvana Praudha Vidyabhivardhani in the Sankar mutt at Bangalore in the presence of the Maharaja and his principal officers.

In all the administrative and land reforms and in the welfare activities that the Jagadguru introduced, he had the unstinting support of the Maharaja's government and it was largely due to the joint efforts of the government and the samasthanam authorities that the Sringeri Jagir was complimented as being as progressive as any of the progressive states in India. Again when at the Jagadguru's request the Mysore Government enacted the Sringeri Jagir Inam Settlement Regulation of 1897, the rules and notifications bear testimony to the anxiety of the Mysore and the India Governments not to impair in any way the rights and privileges of the samasthanam.

The proclamation in the Mysore Gazette, dated April 11, 1912 announcing the *Videhamukti* of this great Acharya, eloquent as it is, is but a faint echo of the real feelings of the noble Maharaja. Runs the proclamation:

"His Highness the Maharaja of Mysore has learnt with great regret the demise of His Holiness Sri Satchidananda Sivabhinava Narasimha Bharathi Swamy of Sringeri Mutt. His Holiness had, by his profound scholarship, deep piety and an unbroken holy life of forty-six years as the head of this revered institution won the love and admiratin not only of his disciples throughout India, but of all who had in any way come into contact with him, and His Highness the Maharaja feels that the loss to the Hindu world and religion is irreparable.....—"

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The next Acharya, Sri Chandrasekhara Bharati III had the Kumbhabhishekam of the renovated temple of Sri Sarada and the shrine erected over the *samadhi* of his *guru* performed in 1916 at which the Maharaja was present. In 1924 the Maharaja received the Jagadguru in his palace at Mysore with all tokens of devotion. The Maharaja had such a deep affection for the Jagadguru that he deputed his personal medical attendant to Sringeri to report to him about the Jagadguru's health. Among the private papers of His Holiness has been found a *stotra* to Sri Sarada Devi composed by him praying for the prosperity of the Maharaja. This *guru-sishya bhava* is something unique.

At the desire of His Holiness, the Maharaja's Government appointed a senior officer of their administrative service to look after the revenue affairs of the Samasthanam in consultation with His Holiness.

Whenever the Sringeri Jagadgurus visited Mysore or Bangalore, they were received with palace honours and a salute of 21 guns.

Reference has been made rather frequently in the course of this brief review to the steps which rulers took to uphold the primacy and high privileges of the Sringeri matt. In doing so, they only perpetuated the tradition set by the Vijayanagar Emperors.

The minor mutts within Mysore continued to make representations and even instituted law suits claiming the privileges accorded to the Sringeri mutt, and they were all turned down. The Kudli mutt took up the claim to the British Resident who also rejected it. The request of the Kumbakonam mutt to display *saptakalasa ambari* on *elephant and addapalaki*, in processions as Sringeri Jagadgurus do, was also rejected (1928). The Mysore Government in their Muzarai department published a "Manual of Birudas and other honours enjoyed by the Mattadhipathis in and outside Mysore" (1933) which establishes beyond doubt the primacy of the Sringeri mutt.

His Highness Maharaja Jeya Chamaraja Wadeyar had his first *darsan* of the Holiness, the present Acharya, in Ootacamund (January 1959). Two years later His Highness devoutly and lavishly entertained the Jagadguru in his palace at Mysore, and presented other valuable offerings. His Holiness was taken to the palace in a golden palanquin and was offered *padapuja* according to the ancient custom in the place. The Jagadguru blessed the Maharaja and all the members of the royal family. In March 1963, the Maharaja attended the *Kumbhabhishekam* of the Sarada temple in Sringeri, which had been provided with a *gopuram* over the entrance, of the shrine over the *samadhi* of Jagadguru Chandrasekhara Bharati and of the shrine of Sri Sankara, and the *Sahasrachandi homa*. Again in February 1964, the Maharaja visited Sringeri with his family and attended the Kotinamaarchana to Sarada Devi and the homas. In April the Maharaja had

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darsan of the Jagadguru at Mysore, and again before going to Madras to take over the Governorship of that State, and soon after assuming charge he came to Bangalore and again conveyed his respects to the Jagadguru in the Sankar Matt there.

In August 1964 His Highness along with the royal family had *darsan* of His Holiness at Courtallam and arranged for conducting the Sathachandi Yajna under the guidance of His Holiness.

At Salem during the Chathurmasya of 1965 His Highness replied to the address of the Salem disciples in the presence of His Holiness.

When the Sahasrachandi and Athirudram were conducted during the Navarathri celebrations at Navasuja, in Madras, under the guidance of His Holiness, His Highness the Maharajah of Mysore and Governor of Madras made frequent visits and conveyed his respects to the present Jagadguru of Sringeri Sarada Peetham. On 23rd October 1965 during the Vardhanti of His Holiness, His Highness presided over the citizens, meeting to pay their homage to His Holiness.

Thus is perpetuated the unbroken bond of devotion on one side and affection and bonediction on the other, that has existed for centuries between the royal house of Mysore and the sacred *Sarada pitha* at Sringeri.

VI

"*The Empire and the Papacy*" is the heading of a large section of the history of Europe. It is a long chronicle of centuries of *feuds* between the Holy See and the European monarchies. The chapter in South Indian History that may be called "The Holy Sarada Pita in Sringeri and South Indian Monarchies," presents a highly refreshing contrast. Monarchs out of *Bhakti* and in quest of spiritual merit invested the Jagadgurus with secular power and divine honours which they meticulously fostered. In return the Jagadgurus showered benediction upon them and their people. Inexorable time and new socio-political ideas have extinguished the old monarchies and *jagirs*. Still do the noble scions of the historic royal houses continue to cherish and adore the holy pitha. It may be said that the Sringeri Samasthanam has now been relegated to the limbo of history and the temporal authority of the pontiff has come to an end, but what power can extinguish his spiritual authority? The Jagadguru continues and will continue to sway the hearts of millions of disciples among whom the Maharaja will hold a position of preeminence.

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